



STATE OF IOWA

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IOWA CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION
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Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Iowa Civil Rights Commission Announces Two Fair Housing Studies for Summer 2009

Over the next several weeks, the Iowa Civil Rights Commission is conducting two separate fair housing research projects – one related to the accessibility of covered multifamily dwellings for persons with disabilities and the other related to the residential rental practices of property managers in processing inquiries and applications by families with minor children. “Research projects help inform us on what Iowa is doing right and areas where we need to strengthen education, outreach, or enforcement,” according to Ralph Rosenberg, Director of the Iowa Civil Rights Commission.

State and Federal Fair Housing Laws prohibit discrimination in the sale or rental of residential property based on certain protected personal characteristics, including disability and familial status (the presence of minor children in the household).

The Iowa Civil Rights Commission works cooperatively with the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in the enforcement of those laws and in the education of persons active in the real estate industry, including government officials who review and approve building plans and construction. When completed, these research projects will help the Commission and HUD determine the nature and extent of compliance with those laws in the construction of accessible multifamily dwellings and in the rental of apartments to families with minor children.

Accessibility of covered multifamily dwellings for persons with disabilities. The first step in the *accessibility* study will be to determine which municipalities in Iowa have adopted building codes deemed by HUD as “safe harbors” (i.e. codes that incorporate the fair housing accessibility requirements). The second step will be to determine how each of those communities enforces their building codes. The third and final step will be to inspect 25-30 newly constructed multifamily dwellings around Iowa to measure the level of compliance with fair housing laws. ICRC is attempting to learn whether and to what extent the code review by building code officials is also serving to ensure that multi-family dwellings are being built in compliance with the state and federal fair housing laws.

Residential rental practices for processing inquiries and applications by families with minor children. The first step in the *residential rental study* will be to identify 25-30 dwelling units advertised as available for rent in 6 cities -- Ames, Ankeny, Council Bluffs, Des Moines, Iowa City, and Marshalltown. The second step will be to contact the property owner or manager regarding each of the randomly selected advertised properties. Matched pair testers – one with minor children in the household and one without – will call or visit the owner or manager to inquire about the dwelling unit. The purpose of the testing is to determine whether the owner or manager treats applicants differently in the terms and conditions of rental based on familial status.

Reports summarizing the results of the summer fair housing research projects will be made public to help educate the housing industry, local government entities, and other stakeholder groups. According to Ralph Rosenberg, “The Civil Rights Commission works to end discrimination through enforcement, training, and education and outreach. Consistent with these goals are efforts to prevent discrimination from ever occurring in the first place by educating housing providers.” Rosenberg added, “According to the State data center, there are 233,794 Iowans in 2007 reporting a physical disability, a condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities, such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting, or carrying. We need to ensure that there are accessible housing options for Iowans with disabilities.”

For more information regarding either of these summer projects, please contact the executive director of the Iowa Civil Rights Commission, Ralph Rosenberg.